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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001487

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: DAS FEIGENBAUM'S MEETING WITH FM JEKSHENKULOV

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum and Ambassador Yovanovitch met with Foreign Minister Alimbek Jekshenkulov October 17 in Bishkek. DAS Feigenbaum stressed our multi-dimensional commitment to Central Asia and to Kyrgyzstan. He said that a difficult period over the summer had raised questions about the bilateral relationship, but there was now an opportunity to demonstrate tangible improvement. Jekshenkulov said that approval of Kyrgyzstan's Millennium Challenge Account Threshold Country Plan would be the "best sign" for strengthening the relationship and boosting development. Jekshenkulov criticized the Kyrgyz political opposition for its "radicalism" and lack of constructive proposals. He cautioned the U.S. side that continuing to meet with "former government officials" (who were now in the opposition) raised anti-American sentiments. He also urged the U.S. to observe "balance" in its approach to Kyrgyzstan, noting that "democracy" can be used as a cover for "religious extremism." Feigenbaum replied that for us, "balance" means engaging with all sides -- the government, civil society, and the opposition, and he pressed the Foreign Minister for support in resolving bilateral issues and moving forward on reforms. END SUMMARY.

REBUILDING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

¶12. (C) DAS Feigenbaum began the meeting by stressing U.S. commitment to the region and to Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. approach is multi-dimensional, working on security, economic development, energy, the environment, and democratic reform with each country in the region. Certain U.S. priorities are cross-cutting, such as the rule of law promotion, which affects not only democracy and human rights but also seeks to improve the business climate. While we focus on the countries of the region individually, we also view Central Asia as part of a larger picture, and look to strengthen its

ties to Western organizations, such as the OSCE and the EU, and develop its economic ties in all directions on the compass.

¶13. (C) Turning to the bilateral relationship, Feigenbaum said that while ties had been strong over Kyrgyzstan's nearly 15 years of independence, U.S.-Kyrgyz relations had reached a low point this past summer. The negative events of the summer -- particularly the expulsion of two U.S. diplomats -- had raised questions at senior levels in Washington about the GOKG's vision and direction. Feigenbaum said that relations were now better, but in order to repair more fully the damage, he urged the Kyrgyz Government to take action on four key points. He asked for the Minister's support in getting the Embassy's Surveillance Detection Team up and running again. Feigenbaum urged that the GOKG take the steps necessary to attract international investment; for example, in the energy sector, the American firm AES was ready to sign an MOU with the GOKG but had received mixed signals from members of the government. Feigenbaum said that the MCC would soon consider Kyrgyzstan's Threshold Country Plan, but it would help the chances of a positive outcome if Kyrgyzstan immediately took steps on its own to begin reforms of the judiciary and law enforcement sectors, as well as having President Bakiyev invest himself in the reform process by speaking publicly for judicial independence. And finally, DAS Feigenbaum stressed the importance of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) as a symbol of the bilateral relationship, and he asked for the GOKG's support in resolving AUCA's accreditation issues.

ENERGY SECTOR: NO AGREEMENT ON PRIVATIZATION

¶14. (C) Acknowledging the recent difficulties in the bilateral
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relationship, Jekshenkulov joked that sometimes it was necessary to fight to show that the relationship was strong. Jekshenkulov said that resolving the issues surrounding the SD Team was a matter for the MVD and SNB, not the MFA. Regarding the energy sector, Jekshenkulov said the government, in principle, welcomed the participation of foreign companies -- from any country. Asked whether Vice Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov's recent comments to AES indicated that the government was against U.S. participation, Jekshenkulov said that Usenov's views flatly contradicted the President's, and, in any event, "he (Usenov) may say something different tomorrow." The real problem, he said, was that Kyrgyzstan had not yet decided internally how to reform the energy sector. While the President and the government fully supported establishing "consortia" in the sector, the Parliament firmly opposed privatization to foreign companies.

MCA: PUSHING FOR A POSITIVE DECISION

¶15. (C) Jekshenkulov said that a favorable decision on Kyrgyzstan's MCA Threshold Country Plan would be the "best sign" of a strengthening relationship. Even if Kyrgyzstan did not meet the "highest standards," a political decision to approve the program would help Kyrgyzstan to carry out its reforms. DAS Feigenbaum countered that it was not a political decision, that the criteria the MCC uses to assess countries were objective. While we were hopeful of a positive outcome in November, there was no guarantee that MCC would approve the plan, as there was concern in Washington that Kyrgyzstan was regressing on some key indicators. Feigenbaum suggested that Kyrgyzstan could help its case by taking immediate steps on its own to begin reform of the judicial and law enforcement sectors targeted by the Threshold Country Plan. For example, the government could adopt the new laws that it had undertaken to pass as part of the MCA reform process, and President Bakiyev could take steps to demonstrate public support for real judicial

independence.

¶ 16. (C) Jekshenkulov said there should be greater appreciation for the government's efforts on reform and stability, but there were limits to what the government could do. Progress on the new laws, he said, was blocked by the political opposition in parliament. Reform in the judicial and law enforcement sectors was hampered by the low quality of the cadres. He added that even most of the country's lawyers lacked understanding of how to proceed on judicial reform. He said that a new generation of educated specialists was needed to lead the civil service, the judicial sector, and the law enforcement agencies. Jekshenkulov agreed with DAS Feigenbaum on the importance of education to Kyrgyzstan's future, but offered nothing specific on AUCA.

CRITICIZING THE MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (AND THOSE WHO TALK TO THEM)

¶ 17. (C) Jekshenkulov continued his criticism of the members of the political opposition, charging that there was "radicalism" in their agenda and that they had no "constructive proposals." He also raised a question about those who meet with the opposition. Jekshenkulov cautioned the U.S. side that continuing to meet with "former government officials" (who were now in the opposition) raised anti-American sentiments. He urged the U.S. to observe "balance" in its assessment of the situation in Kyrgyzstan, noting that "democracy" can be used as a cover for "religious extremism." Islamic radicalism had been "quiet" for a while, he said, but once it was "out," it would be hard to control. He pointed to the example of Imam Kamalov, who was shot dead by Kyrgyz security forces in August. Kamalov had been with a

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group of IMU members who disobeyed police orders to stop and opened fire on police; his death was not a "political killing."

¶ 18. (C) Jekshenkulov complained of U.S. criticism over the decision to return five Uzbek asylum seekers in August; he claimed there were no similar statements when other countries (Russia, Kazakhstan) returned refugees. In any event, he said, Procurator General Kongantiyev had acted on evidence that those returned to Uzbekistan had been involved in drug smuggling and murder. Noting that Kyrgyzstan had a complicated mix of ethnic groups, parties, tribes, and clans, Jekshenkulov said that it had caused difficulties when the Ambassador met last spring with an Uzbek leader in the south. The fact of the meeting led people to believe that the U.S. supported his cause, and it fed the leader's ambitions because he, too, believed he had U.S. support.

¶ 19. (C) DAS Feigenbaum replied that we have a different view of "balance." For us, "balance" means engaging with the full spectrum of Kyrgyz society -- the government, civil society, and the opposition. This engagement and dialogue promotes understanding and tolerance. Feigenbaum also rebuffed Jekshenkulov's complaints about lack of balance in the criticism over refoulement, pointing out that we had publicly praised Kyrgyzstan when it had protected asylum seekers, and that we held Kyrgyzstan to the same international standards to which we all have obligated ourselves.

COMMENT

¶ 10. (C) After starting slowly, Jekshenkulov became increasingly engaged as the meeting progressed. He offered no indication that he would make any effort to respond to any of DAS Feigenbaum's proposed areas for improved cooperation. Rather, he seemed to expect the U.S. to accept that reforms are stalled and to refrain from meeting with the opposition. Jekshenkulov's cautions, however, were only a prelude to MFA actions later in the day. MFA officials contacted the

diplomatic missions in Bishkek, including us, to request that the diplomatic corps not attend an October 19 briefing by the "For Reforms" movement, lest the "For Reforms" movement portray attendance as international support for its planned anti-government rally on November 2. Despite the warning, representatives from the Kazakhstani, Tajik, French, Japanese, and U.S. embassies and from the UN attended the briefing. We also understand that Jekshenkulov has instituted new procedures to control Embassy meetings with Ministries; we do not plan to comply. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) DAS Feigenbaum has cleared this cable.
YOVANOVITCH